

REBECCA MASLEN

Electric Chill

I'm carrying a piece of you with me. Luckily you didn't wake when I took it, considering I had to yank it out of you. Luckily you're a sound sleeper, dead to the world, locked away in your dreams.

At first I had it wrapped in a piece of plum-colored silk. The inky purple-red made you shine, especially in the moonlight. I'd lay it on the pillow next to me and whisper sweet nothings to it until I'd fall asleep, smiling. I even thought you moved once, like a quivering, but I realized it was me from delight at having you at my beck and call, even if it was only one small piece.

But having it wrapped up wasn't tangible enough. I needed to be able to touch you whenever I needed the thrill, the reassurance you gave me. So I carried it in the small front pocket of a sweater I never really liked, until I realized how easy it was to reach in with one finger or my whole hand and stroke you, resting all cozy inside. Sure, you started to collect lint, but that only added to your charm. Almost like a little fur blanket to keep your warm when my touch couldn't.

Then I dropped you, once in the grass in the park. Under a shady tree, we were having a picnic together. Such a lovely early autumn day. I was trying to raise you higher to see the bird chirping in the high branches when you slipped and fell. Tumbling away from the blanket and into the high grass. I thought for a second you were trying to get away from me, but I found you quickly and laughed it off. You can be such a naughty thing sometimes.

The second time wasn't nearly so whimsical. I was in the elevator of my building, riding up to the 16th floor. There were 5 other people in the elevator, but that didn't stop me from spend some quality time with you. I was passing you over my fingers, like some people do with a quarter. I could feel the layer of lint becoming thicker, picking up dirt and grime within it. My arm was at a strange angle to be doing this little game with you, and the man next to me bumped it when we made a jarring stop at 14. You sprung out of my pocket, like a jumping bean, and landed between my foot and the woman on the other side of me. She looked down and looked at me with a strange look on her face. Confusion and that pale sickly look people get right before throwing up. I gave her my friendliest, most

innocent smile. Why, it's just a prop for a magic trick, I reassured her. You know, I magically pull this off the unsuspecting mark, and they think it's really from them. Ha ha. I don't think she believed me, but she nicely pretended to. Then the doors slid open at 16. I stooped down and in one motion, scooped you up and walked into the hallway. Wow, that was a close one. I could have sworn she wanted you all for herself.

Finally, came the night. When we could consummate our love. Manifesting the incorporeal. Our physicalities joining together in a blissful union. I sprayed the sheets with my favorite perfume, lit some candles around the room, and made myself look like an angel. All for you. It was heavenly. The caresses. The heartfelt words. It was all too much. Then I took you inside me. The anticipation and weeks of waiting were worth it. My body never felt such delight. I shuddered and moaned and trembled and sighed. No one ever made me feel like that before. Honestly. I would never lie to you about that. The only problem was you were kinda scratchy in there, with all the dirt and lint rubbing around. But that's a minor inconvenience to put up with for the chance to be with you.

Today, in the lobby of my building, I suddenly feel very ill. Doubled over in pain is more like it. I clutch the wall for support. I clutch my abdomen to keep in whatever it is that wants to come out of me. Are you rebelling against me? Is this retribution for our night of passion together? Did you give me some sort of nasty disease? You told me everything would be ok. And I'm in the middle of yelling this at you when the same woman from the elevator comes over with that same look on her face. No, no. I'm sorry about shouting, but I'm in a great deal of pain and I need a doctor. She scurries to the doorman's station while a particularly violent spasm shoots through me. The pain you give me is just as intense as your pleasure, and I'm not sure which one I enjoy more. Although the next stabbing pain makes me question that. I hear sirens. The woman and the doorman stop one of the EMTs while the other comes over to check on me. Why are the three of them looking at me? No, the pain just started now, but it's really horrible. Like an alien is going to burst out right below my belly button. Why is the other one talking to me like that? I'm not crazy. Only crazy people are spoken to with those soothing tones, so as not to alarm them. Why are you checking my pocket? I've got nothing in there. Don't listen to that woman. It was a prop for a magic trick. What do you mean what have I done with it? That's none of your business. The pain makes me throw up a little in the back of my throat, but I choke it back. I don't want to offend or alarm you, even if the pain is bad. What are

you two doing? Why are you holding my legs? No, no, no, NO, NO NO NO NO. That's mine. You can't take it from me. It belongs to me. We belong together.

The pain is still there, but I feel so empty now. I cry from the pain in my body and the numbness in my heart that's settling in quickly. The EMTs wrap a blanket around me and place me on a gurney. What are you going to do with it? Do you promise? Promise me it will be waiting there for me. I'll only get better if it's there with me. And promise not to clean it off. The dirt is part of its charm.

Rebecca Maslen is a recent graduate of the MFA in Creative Writing program at Rosemont College. Her prose-poem "rock me amadeus," which was published by Flashquake, has been nominated for this year's Pushcart Prize. "Electric Chill" is part of a larger interactive collaborative piece on www.rebeccamaslen.com (which she encourages everyone to participate in).